

MORRIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
1515 Morris Street  
Topeka  
Shawnee County  
Kansas

HABS NO. KS-67

HABS  
KANS,  
89-TOPEKA,  
1-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MONROE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HABS No. KS-67

Location: 1515 Monroe St., Shawnee County, Topeka, Kansas

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
A15.268360.4324140

Present Owner: Mr. Mark Stueve, President, S/S Builders

Present Use: The building stands vacant.

Significance: The Monroe School is one of two elementary schools in Topeka, Kansas that is associated with the landmark Oliver Brown et. al. v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court decision of 1954. The Brown decision overturned the authority of the Plessy v. Ferguson case (1896), which provided a legal justification for segregation with its famous doctrine of "separate but equal." Many have also argued that the Brown decision was the impetus behind the modern Civil Rights Movement because it gave blacks a legal framework to begin challenging the structure of institutional discrimination.

Monroe Elementary School was designed by Thomas Williamson, a local architect. Williamson was extremely prolific, producing hundreds of buildings in Topeka and throughout the state from 1912 to the 1960s. He is best known in this area for his design of Topeka High School. Although vacant today, the Monroe School stands as an icon of African-American organizational abilities and of community activity; it is a reminder of the premium that black citizens have long put on education; and it is a testament to the racial climate of Topeka which stands in contrast to those communities of the Jim Crow South that were also a part of the Brown decision.

Historian: Sarah Heath, HABS, summer 1993

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1926. The Topeka Clerk of Courts' office granted building permits to the Topeka Board of Education for the purpose of erecting an elementary

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school for black children. Earlier Monroe Schools (also overseen by the Topeka Board of Education) stood on parts of the same lot, although they were situated closer to 15th Street than the present structure. The Topeka School Board purchased more lots to the south of the original school, and began construction of the new facility. Monroe Elementary School was erected in 1926 at a cost of \$110,800, and the old building was razed after the new project was completed.

2. Architect: Thomas Williamson. Williamson was the architect who designed all of Topeka's public school buildings from 1912 to the 1960s. An extremely prolific architect, he designed several schools; homes; churches; public facilities like the Mulvane Art Museum on Washburn University's campus and the Phillip Billard Airport; and business buildings such as Topeka's Coca-Cola Bottling Company and the IBM office building. He also designed several other structures throughout Kansas and as far away as Iowa and Maryland. He is perhaps best known in this area for designing Topeka High School in 1935.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Monroe School was owned and overseen by the Topeka Public School system from 1868 until the school was closed for lack of enrollment in 1975.

Monroe school was sold in 1981 to Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene, which planned to use the building as "an inner city church with community based ministries for the immediate community." The church submitted proposals for the renovation of the school and began some of those alterations by removing interior partitions. The church held its congregational meetings in the building and it opened a clothing bank and a dental center to serve the community. Its larger plan to open a halfway house with a dormitory, however, were never completed.

In 1985, the building was sold again to Mark A. Stueve, President of S/S Builders, for the purpose of using it as a warehouse. Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene still held its weekly congregational meetings until the late 1980s, when a fire blackened some of the first-floor southeast room that they were using. Mr. Stueve had put the building up for auction in 1990 until the Brown Foundation interceded because of the historical significance of the property. When he learned that the Monroe school was involved with the Brown decision, Mr. Stueve endorsed it for consideration as a National Historic Site and agreed to take the building off the market. Monroe School was declared a National Historic

Landmark in December 1991.

4. Original plans and construction: The school's original drawings are available (currently under some restrictions) in the Kansas Collection at the University of Kansas. It was designed and built as a two-story brick structure that measured 61' x 174' with a clay tile roof. It faced east onto a large triangular grassy park across Monroe Avenue that lay between the school and the nearby railroad tracks. The field was owned by the Board of Education and was used for recreational purposes; a baseball backstop still stands in a corner of that area.

5. Alterations and additions: Monroe School essentially stands as it did in 1926. Monroe never withstood dramatic additions, although it has undergone several minor alterations.

The red clay tiles that were a part of the original roof have been removed and were replaced with a red asphalt shingle roof. Remnants of mass-produced clay tiles left in the attic and old photographs verify that clay tiles were on the original structure.

The brick chimney, once a rather prominent feature of the building, was removed and replaced with a shortened (10') metal stack. It appears that the chimney was still functional at the time of removal.

Many of the non-load bearing interior terra cotta and plaster partitions that were a part of the original school have been removed from the first- and second-floor classrooms, although their position can be determined by recesses in the walls, ceiling, and floor of the present structure. Partitions were also removed from the first-floor classrooms in the southeast corner of the building, although walls, ceiling, and floors have been patched. Faint indentations in the walls and ceiling indicate that vestibules were once in place at either end of the main corridor.

Some of the wood casework of the original school has been removed (e.g., cabinets, bookshelves, closets and wardrobes).

A small stage or altar area was added in the southeast room on the first floor where it served the congregational meetings of the Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene.

With the increased use of the building in the early

1980s, the open stairways were enclosed with gypsum board to meet building code standards. A newel post still remains at the base of both stairs, suggesting that children once used a rail when climbing or descending an open staircase. The original balustrade may still exist within the partition.

Although unconfirmed at this point, it is possible that the stage in the auditorium was raised. A second horizontal surface exists 14" below the present stage, and there are two types of lath and plaster construction behind the front wall of the stage.

Updated electric service in Monroe school was installed in 1957. Exterior security lighting was added to the building in 1975. Fluorescent lights replaced the lighting fixtures in the hallways in the early 1980s.

Air conditioner units were placed in some rooms on the first floor in 1963.

Most of the white enameled-steel fixtures in the bathrooms have been disconnected, but are still stored in the building.

The teacher's lounge and office which flank the axis corridor at the building's entrance were retiled, had plumbing installed, and had new doors added in the summer of 1969.

## B. Historical Context

### 1. Black citizens and public education in Kansas

In the early nineteenth century, the Kansas Territory was a popular destination for migrating settlers. The flat prairies proved to be productive farmland, and many farmers hoped that they could claim some land and harvest a lucrative crop. With the white settlers came a small population of blacks, some slaves of landowners, others free blacks who had migrated westward, and some as bondsmen who had escaped from Missouri across the Kansas River to their freedom.

The status of blacks in Kansas and other western territories quickly became a heated issue. First, not all white Kansans were receptive to the idea of a black presence in the territory. For others, the primary concern was whether Kansas would be represented as a slave or as a free state once it entered the Union. Since new states were to be formed of the western

territories that had been part of the Louisiana Purchase, politicians of the North worried that the entrance of too many slave states would mean that the interests of slaveholders would dominate American politics, while those of the South feared domination by free labor advocates.

To ensure a continued balance of political power between "slave" and "free" states, the Missouri Compromise was passed in 1820. The Compromise established that Missouri could enter the Union as a slave state, but that its southern border would serve as a dividing line between all slave and free territories thereafter. The ensuing years brought the debate to a head in Kansas and surrounding territories. A new ordinance was passed in 1850 which attempted to quell further disagreements. The Compromise of 1850 allowed California to enter as a free state, but other territories entering the Union were given the right to determine their own status.

In Kansas, the debate was especially bitter, since both slaveowners and abolitionists inhabited the territory. The territory came to be known as "bleeding Kansas" because of its volatile uprisings, such as John Brown's violent attack against slaveowners at Pottawatomie Creek and the proslavery invasion of Lawrence. Still, by the outbreak of the Civil War, Kansas had passed a state Constitution; it was admitted to the Union as a free state, although blacks living in the state would not be permitted to vote. Kansans also contributed heavily to the Union war effort. According to historian Richard Kluger, "its contributions in manpower to the Union war effort proved proportionately greater than that of any other state."

In the immediate post-Civil War period, African-American citizens were plunged into a new and radically different lifestyle than their previous experiences as slaves. The passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments offered to black Americans a basic guarantee of their citizenship and freedom. In response, some white citizens, wanting to continue restricting the rights of African-Americans, tried to oversee a legal and social restructuring of society that would continue to maintain their legal authority over blacks.

In the South, former bondsmen were often restricted by the infamous "Black Codes" into staying near where their former owners lived. Since many former slaves had no capital saved, they were often trapped by economic necessity into serving as tenants or as sharecroppers.

Violence against blacks, including lynching, was another way that whites tried to exert forceful control of their former chattel. Finally, blacks, fearing that southern whites were seeking to reinstate the institution of slavery, reasoned that the South was not a safe place for them to begin their lives as free people.

In the face of such direct confrontation, blacks founded various self-help organizations that tried to protect members of their race and to exercise their rights as citizens. However, many blacks believed that the best way to relieve themselves of the hostility they faced was to migrate to other areas of the country that were more receptive toward the presence of African-Americans. Kansas was a logical choice for many blacks. "Bleeding Kansas" had been a cradle of abolitionist fervor at least since the 1850s. After the Civil War, many blacks also heard rumors of the extensive tracts of land that would afford them the opportunity to provide for themselves. Kansas thus became a "Promised Land" for many of the newly freed slaves.

Two particularly prominent freedmen, Henry Adams and Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, became involved in what has since been labeled the "Exodus of 1879," in which thousands of blacks moved to Kansas from the South. Although not all of the so-called "Exodusters" were former slaves, historian Nell Irvin Painter has shown that many came from Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Painter found that several of those individuals came to Kansas to escape the harsh social conditions and the economic hardships that they faced in the South. By 1880, some 43,110 African-Americans had moved to Kansas. Some went to exclusively black settlements (like Nicodemus), while others chose to live in a large city where the opportunities for work seemed to be greater.

Once in Kansas, blacks often tried to form schools or to take part in those that already existed. Black citizens placed a high premium on the education of their children, equating education with the improvement of the race. Black newspapers, for example, insisted that "the real key to the progress of our race or any other lies in education. Next to the right to worship God there is no right that is more sacred than the right of every child to have an equal opportunity for an education." Newspapers also reminded their readers in large advertisements that "Booker T. Washington walked 500 miles for an education and became one of the nation's immortals." African-Americans took such directives seriously, such as the man who said that "I am going to

school my children if I have to eat bread and water."

Some white individuals in Kansas communities were willing to offer blacks equal access to public education. In Topeka, for instance, the Superintendent of Schools, L.C. Wilmarth, declared in 1868:

I trust the Board of Education who must fully recognize the claims that the colored race have upon us for educational privileges, will have no hesitancy in acting promptly in this matter and furnish additional facilities for the colored schools.

It is plainly to be seen, that but a short time will elapse, ere the colored race by the general law of progress, will be placed, side by side with us, equal participants in all rights, franchises, and privileges of our government, qualified candidates for Legislative, Executive, and Judicial honors. Therefore, it behooves us to be preparing not only for him, but ourselves, for the coming changes by freely furnishing them with the best of educational advantages. I hope the board will see fit either to establish a grade school for colored children or to admit them with the whites into any of the schools of the city.

Others, however, contested such a policy, reflecting a decades-long debate over the issue of public schooling for black and white children. As early as the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention in 1859, white Kansans had proved to be evenly divided on the issue of educating white and black children together in public schools. About half the delegates shared the sentiments of one who argued:

What claim has one class of men to the common benefits of this country above that of each and all classes? If any gentleman can point out any view or precedent that can be recognized in law or justice, we will yield the point. We must proceed on the supposition that the blacks are to live in common with the whites. It is supposed that they are to mingle and live together with us. I ask if it is desirable to see that class of citizens growing up in entire ignorance? If they are to live in the Territory they should be made as intelligent and as moral as education can make them.



On the other hand, some delegates to the convention inveighed against the education of white and black children together, maintaining that:

It may be gentlemen have been raised with different prejudices from those I possess, and with different ideas; but for me, sir, I shall never consent, by my vote, or by any action of mine, that those upon whom Nature's God has stamped inferiority, shall ever associate with my children in common schools, which I hope to assist in supporting.

The superintendent of Wyandotte schools apparently agreed when he said in 1876 that "There are a large number of colored pupils in this county, and where they predominate, or attend schools in considerable numbers, these mixed schools are not a success." It would not be until three years later that Kansas would establish a formal legal precedent that would resolve some of the debate over education of black children.

In 1879, the state legislature established the legal structure that would dominate Kansas public schools well into the twentieth century. The new law declared that cities of over 15,000 residents (called cities of the "first class") were permitted (but not required) to segregate their elementary schools. However, the state legislature also specified that in high schools "no discrimination shall be made on account of color." This legislation was later followed by the Law of 1905, which allowed high schools in Kansas City to segregate their black and white students.

Despite the seeming climate of compromise among lawmakers in Kansas and the promises that the Fourteenth Amendment offered, segregationists still worked to keep black children in separate educational institutions. In 1896, the legal landmark of Plessy v. Ferguson provided a sweeping justification to achieve this objective. Homer Plessy, who claimed one-eighth black ancestry, was denied access to a "white" railroad car on the grounds that Louisiana state law required "equal but separate accommodations" for black and white railroad patrons. The Supreme Court upheld the state statute, and thus provided public facilities across the nation (including schools) a legal precedent that permitted separation of the races.

Beginning in 1881, black citizens tried to use the courts to their advantage to confront segregation in public schools. By 1949, at least twelve cases had traveled to

the Kansas Supreme Court, which considered the issue of segregation in education. Black plaintiffs won nine of these twelve cases. Five of the victories (Board of Education v. Elijah Tinnon, 1881; Knox v. Board of Education of Independence, 1891; Cartwright v. Board of Education of Coffeyville, 1906; Woolridge et. al. v. Board of Education of Galena, 1916; and Webb v. School District 90 in Johnson County, 1949) used the Law of 1879 to their advantage. In these cases, plaintiffs contended that they were being placed in separate schools and that the law specifically permitted segregation only for cities of the first class.

Even when the law did permit segregation, plaintiffs such as those in Williams v. Board of Education of Parsons, 1908, could claim that they still did not enjoy equality of opportunity guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment when their children had to risk injury to get to school (in this case, by crossing thirteen busy railroad tracks). Other children who attended segregated elementary schools successfully appealed to the courts for the right to attend public high schools. In Rowles v. Board of Education of Wichita, 1907; Celia Thurman-Watts v. Board of Education of Coffeyville, 1924; and Graham v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1941, the plaintiffs asserted that the Laws of 1879 and 1905 did not permit segregation of public high schools (except in Kansas City after 1905). Thus, some black citizens who asserted their legal rights in the courts were able to claim their right to public education.

However, the legal system was not uniformly favorable to blacks who went to court to confront segregation in public schools. Both Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1903, and Wright v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1930, were decided against black litigants because the Law of 1879 specifically permitted segregation of elementary schools in cities of more than 15,000 residents. Richardson v. Board of Education of Kansas City (1906) was also framed on the legality of school segregation, since the Law of 1905 permitted separate high schools in that city. The courts referred obliquely to Plessy v. Ferguson when they noted that plaintiffs in the Wright case did not illustrate any difference between the black school in question, Buchanan Elementary, and the white schools in Topeka. The court implied that although separate institutions were legal, the plaintiffs could have tried to show that they were unequal in order to win their case.

Despite the obvious challenges of segregation, black

citizens still took advantage of the educational opportunities that remained open to them. From 1890 to 1920, for example, the literacy rate among black citizens climbed from 67.2 percent to 91.2 percent. In Topeka, blacks worked to become teachers themselves. They went to colleges and earned advanced degrees. In fact, black teachers in Topeka on the average held multiple degrees more often than did white instructors. Although they taught at segregated schools in Topeka, black teachers were paid at the same rates as teachers in the schools reserved for whites, a testament to the quality of black instructors.

## 2. Topeka, Kansas:

Topeka, the capital city of Kansas and the Shawnee County seat, quickly became one of the popular stopping points for African-Americans who migrated westward during the "Exodus." By 1950, blacks constituted 7.5 percent of Topeka's 100,000 citizens.

Historian Richard Kluger has classified Topeka in the 1950s as a "Jim Crow town," suggesting that it was similar in many respects to the South's social system. In what has become a common stereotype of race relations, "Jim Crow" referred to a pervasive system of segregation which also served to maintain the subordinate position of black citizens to whites. In the South, it was common to require that blacks have proof of employment or be arrested on charges of vagrancy. Blacks were required to sit in the back of public transportation and to wait in segregated waiting rooms. In many states legislation forbade marriage of blacks with whites. "Jim Crow" also denied basic civil rights to blacks; it was common, for example, to require that blacks recite their state's constitution letter-perfect before being allowed to vote, without making a similar requirement of white citizens.

Indeed, in many respects the separation of the races that was characteristic of the South could be identified in Topeka. In restaurants, it was customary for black customers to stand at the counter, where they would be served their food in a paper bag so that they could eat it elsewhere. One movie theater was reserved entirely for African-Americans, while one other in Topeka would allow blacks to sit in the balcony only. Blacks had just one hotel available to them, and they were only permitted to use the public swimming pool in Gage park on one day of the year. Black Topekans typically shopped in the black business district which offered a variety of goods and services, including movie theaters, law offices, a

tailor shop, a drug store, and an ice cream shop. In the 1950s, African-American children could attend one of four elementary schools provided for their education (Buchanan, McKinley, Monroe, and Washington Elementary schools), while white children could go to one of eighteen schools throughout the city.

Yet other forms of racially imposed social relations that were part of the Jim Crow South were not characteristic of Topeka. Black Topekans did not ride in the back of public buses, nor did they sit in segregated waiting rooms in train stations. Although small in number, some blacks managed to hold white-collar occupations. Elisha Scott and his sons, for instance, were prominent in Topeka as a family of black lawyers. Washburn University admitted black students, some of whom became teachers in the city's public school system. Additionally, Topeka was more racially mixed than were many parts of the South. Many residential areas could not be defined as exclusively "white" or "black," but rather were somewhat integrated.

Without ignoring the fact that Topeka's elementary schools were segregated by race, it was true that the school district apparently lived up to the dictum of "separate but equal" that was made popular by the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in 1896. Schools for black children in the Jim Crow South were decidedly inferior to those set aside for whites. However, the four schools for black children in Topeka (Buchanan, McKinley, Monroe, and Washington) were physically comparable to the schools for white children.

Still, it was the juxtaposition of relatively integrated social relations in Topeka against the separation of blacks and whites in schools that was disturbing to African-Americans in Topeka. Linda Brown Buckner later remembered that:

We lived in an integrated neighborhood and I had playmates of the Caucasian race, I had playmates of the Native American race... and I had other black playmates there, too. So we all played together, never thinking anything about... skin color... We were just children and really enjoyed each other's company. The thing that really sticks out in my mind is when we talked about school starting and them going to Sumner school and I having to go to Monroe. My playmates couldn't understand that and I couldn't either.

It was against this backdrop that many people began to examine the educational system in Topeka and to question the fairness of a system that sent some of its children to separate and distant schools.

### 3. Monroe Elementary School

The earliest Monroe School dates back to July 13, 1868, when "lots 50, 52, and 54 on Monroe Street were purchased for the erection of a school building for black children." Until the school was constructed, a smaller building was rented on lot 51 of Monroe Street. By 1874 the Monroe School had deteriorated so much that it had to be replaced again by a building constructed on the corner of Fifteenth and Monroe Streets. In 1889, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps showed that the Monroe School was a four-room brick building with a frame cupola and a shingle roof. The building was remodeled in 1911, presumably to meet the needs of a growing student body. A heating plant and a manual training room were added to the basement of the school; the roof was also clad in slate shingles and had an iron chimney.

Despite the improvements, the building did not seem to be durable and needed to be replaced by the 1920s. The Board of Education placed the construction of a new Monroe School above all other projects (a new school west of Boswell Avenue, and additions to both the McKinley and the Washington Schools). In 1925, the Topeka Board of Education acquired an additional fifty feet of space to the south of the building that still stood to accommodate the construction of a new school.

The Topeka Board of Education asked Thomas W. Williamson's architecture firm to draw plans for Monroe School in January, 1926. Williamson's skills and reputation as an architect were well-established. He had designed schools for the Topeka Board of Education since 1912, and was widely respected in Topeka as an architect of high renown and great productivity. The School Board made no mention of any other candidates for the task at hand, saying that "undoubtedly the best interests of the city and community would be served" by selecting Williamson for the project. Williamson submitted preliminary drawings on February 1, 1926. By May, construction contracts were approved, and the building was completed by the beginning of school in the fall at a total cost of \$110,800. Among the students in the first grade class enrolled at Monroe School in 1927 was Leola Williams, who would later become the wife of Oliver Brown and the mother of Linda Brown.

4. Monroe School and the Brown decision:

Linda Brown was enrolled in Monroe Elementary School from 1948 until 1952. She has since called her daily two-mile route to school "altogether... a very frightening experience for a child so young." Each morning at 7:40 she left her home at 511 First Street. She would walk on a narrow strip of grass between the railroad tracks that ran near her house along First Street. Although trains ran past her, this route was preferable to walking along the street, since there were not any sidewalks next to the warehouses that lined First Street. She would cross a busy street (Kansas Avenue) to get to the stop at Quincy Street and catch the school bus that would take her the remainder of the two miles to Monroe School. When the bus was not on time, she was forced to wait outside on the street corner until it came.

Once on the bus, Linda Brown had to contend with an imposing driver. In 1986, she testified before a district court hearing:

...being a small child, I really feared that man because sometimes he would be very harsh. He would fuss at us about getting on the bus quickly; if you don't hurry up and get on the bus I will leave you. You Negroes make me sick, that sort of thing. I got so that I really feared this man when I would get on the bus.

When the bus was on time, Linda Brown would reach Monroe School before the building would open. In those cases, she had to wait outside whatever the weather conditions until school began.

Linda was eight years old and preparing to enter the third grade in the fall of 1951. Her father, Oliver Brown, led her away from the railroad tracks to Sumner Elementary School, four blocks from their home. She waited briefly in the waiting room for her father to emerge, and they walked home. Oliver Brown had tried to enroll his daughter at Sumner and was turned away because his daughter was black. She continued to attend Monroe School, but (at the urging of the Topeka NAACP and one of its attorneys, Charles Scott) Oliver Brown agreed to become a plaintiff in what soon was a court case titled Brown et. al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, since his daughter had to travel so far on a dangerous route to the Monroe school. He joined twelve other parents: Mrs. Richard Lawton, Mrs. Sadie Emmanuel, Mrs. Lucinda Todd, Mrs. Iona Richardson, Mrs. Lena Carper, Mrs. Marguerite

Emerson, Mrs. Shirley Hodison, Mrs. Allen Lewis, Mrs. Darlene Brown, Mrs. Shirila Fleming, Mrs. Andrew Henderson, and Mrs. Vivian Scales.

That Oliver Brown became the center of the now-famous Supreme Court decision is unusual. Certainly, he was an ideal plaintiff for many reasons. He helped to strike a gender balance in the proceedings since he was the only male plaintiff who represented his child. He held a (CIO) union job as a welder on the Santa Fe Railroad; his job was thus much more stable than many other African-Americans, and he could take part in the case with less fear of being fired than many other black Topekan. He was also widely respected as an assistant pastor and sexton at St. John's AME church. Various Topekans concurred with Linda Brown Buckner's description of her father:

He was a very staunch person and what he believed in he really believed in... He was always willing to be a part of whatever he could be to better the community as a whole or to better things for his children growing up.

Yet other factors in the Brown decision show that Oliver Brown was less of the activist than many historians and journalists have argued that he was. First of all, unlike many of the other plaintiffs, Oliver Brown was not an NAACP member. As his daughter, Cheryl, points out, Oliver Brown and his wife Leola did not join the NAACP until after the school desegregation proceedings had begun. His involvement in the case is better explained by the fact that he was a boyhood friend of NAACP attorney Charles Scott.

It also appears that the lawyers of the NAACP had the experience required to build a systematic case against the Board of Education. Charles Scott, one of the lawyers involved with the case, explained that:

It was necessary to recruit plaintiffs. We particularly sought persons who, living near white schools, were turned away because of their race and had to attend an all black school. We recruited nineteen parents who were asked to seek enrollment of the children at the white school nearest them at the start of the 1950-1951 school year. They did and were turned down as expected.

Indeed, Frank Wilson, principal of Sumner Elementary School for the 1950-1951 school year, claims that he knew

Oliver Brown would try to enroll his daughter at Sumner Elementary that morning. Wilson says that Kenneth McFarland, Superintendent of Schools, had called him earlier and informed him that the Topeka NAACP would be testing the enrollment policy of Topeka's public schools. He reminded Wilson that the policy in Topeka was to deny black children admission to Sumner, and instructed Wilson to inform the Browns that Sumner was not in their attendance area. In fact, when Oliver Brown arrived, Wilson says,

I knew that Mr. Brown was coming; I knew that Mr. Brown knew I knew he was coming, and I knew what he was going to ask and he knew what I was going to say. As far as I was concerned, it was a matter of getting the thing on record [for legal purposes]. I sensed no rancor, no enmity, as I recall; it was just a part of the enrollment process.

Charles Scott claimed that Oliver Brown was one of those who he recruited for this "enrollment process." According to Scott, "Mr. Brown was anything but eager to act as a plaintiff. In fact he agreed only after we persuaded him that nothing bad would happen to him. That he gave his name to this court case is quite accidental."

It also appears that, while Oliver Brown was willing to test Sumner school's admission policies, he did not initiate this drive, nor did he suggest such an action to the NAACP. Although Richard Kluger claims that Oliver Brown "took his case to the NAACP," scholars have shown other black Topekans to be the impetus behind the desegregation of schools. Such individuals would have to include Topeka NAACP secretary Lucinda Todd and McKinley Burnett, Topeka NAACP president, who wrote Walter White at the NAACP headquarters in New York in 1950, asking for help with the Topeka schools. Thus, while Oliver Brown was committed to the objective of seeing his daughters attend the school closest to their home, he did not initiate the case that bears his name. Still, Brown became a figurehead for one of the most significant legal changes in the lives of black Americans.

Brown et. al. v. Board of Education was a case that contested the Kansas statute of 1879 permitting the segregation of public elementary schools. It has been classified in various ways, from "the case of the century" by Hugh Speer to "a period piece... [which] had scarcely mattered" by J. Harvie Wilkinson. At the very least, the national focus accorded to the Brown decision and its unprecedented outcome in the Supreme Court make



it a legal landmark. The plaintiffs argued that separate elementary schools were an impediment to black children's education. While many people assume that African-American children were receiving an inferior education, in Topeka the issue was the physical separation of white and black schools, not the quality of black schools.

In fact, the plaintiffs in the Topeka case maintained that their children's teachers were excellent. In 1951, Silas Hardrick Fleming, describing why he became involved with the NAACP efforts, said:

It wasn't to cast any insinuations that our teachers are not capable of teaching our children because they are supreme, extremely intelligent and are capable of teaching my kids or white kids or black kids. But my point was that not only I and my children are craving light-- the entire colored race is craving light, and the only way to reach the light is to start our children together in their infancy and they come up together.

J. B. Holland might have been one of the "supreme" black teachers of Topeka. Frank Wilson served as principal in the newly-integrated Whitson Elementary School over Holland, who had once been principal of Monroe Elementary School. Wilson praised Holland as "one of the most outstanding teachers I had ever come across." He also said that parents were anxious to get their children into a class with Mr. Holland because of his reputation as an entertaining and motivating instructor: "They would fight and bleed and die to get into that class."

Mamie Williams was another indication of the potential of black instructors in Topeka. Williams, born in South Carolina in 1895, moved with her family to Topeka when she was three years old. She graduated from Topeka High School and attended Washburn University, where she graduated with departmental honors in mathematics and in German. She also went to summer study sessions at Columbia University to improve her teaching skills. In Topeka, she earned her reputation as a demanding but fair teacher who motivated her students to perform to her high standards for forty-two years.

The teachers' activities in the classroom were as impressive as their personal accomplishments. Linda Brown Buckner insisted that:

They expected your best every day in that classroom and not only in that classroom but on Sundays at

church, too... It made me as a child feel very secure to know that I had these type of people in my family.

Leola Brown Montgomery also recalled that her teachers were willing to work with their students on a personal and an academic level. According to her, one teacher would sometimes supervise two classes of children so that another could take a sick child home. Black teachers at Monroe also made sure that Leola Montgomery was taught "the basics" of algebra in eighth grade so that she could do well in the class when she reached high school the next year. They encouraged black students to work hard and to "be ready" for the experience and to avoid the embarrassment of not being as well prepared as white students.

The District Court of Kansas even acknowledged the quality of teachers in Topeka's black schools. They agreed with the contention that "segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children." However, they found in favor of the defendant Board of Education on the grounds that "...the physical facilities, courses of study, qualifications of and quality of teachers, as well as other educational facilities in the two sets of schools comparable." Thus, the District Court would leave it to the Supreme Court to reverse itself in the matter of Plessy v. Ferguson and other legal codes that permitted segregation.

Clearly, the issue in Topeka was not the quality of education but rather the sense that segregation imposed on black children a "badge of inferiority" that "relegate[d]... their group to an inferior caste... [and] lowered their level of aspiration." Four cases joined Brown when it finally reached the Supreme Court in December, 1952: Briggs v. Elliott from South Carolina; Davis v. County School Board from Virginia; Gebhart v. Belton from Delaware; and Bolling v. Sharpe in the District of Columbia. Like the lawyers arguing the Brown case, plaintiffs in the other four cases maintained that the act of segregation was inconsistent with the ideals of the Constitution. In addition (and unlike Brown), lawyers from the other four cases were able to show plainly that black schools were vastly inferior to the white schools in their curriculum and in their physical features, although the lawyers in Bolling v. Sharpe chose to emphasize the act of segregation as had the plaintiffs in Brown.

The cases that emerged from the South adhered more closely to stereotypes of the Jim Crow system and of the poor quality of public services offered to black citizens than did the evidence from Topeka. Investigators frequently found that black schools in the South did not have indoor plumbing; they did not provide books for every child; students did not have desks or pencils; classrooms did not have blackboards; and the buildings were often badly deteriorated. None of these problems could be reported in the Monroe School (or the other three all-black buildings in Topeka), which was physically comparable to its white counterpart, the Sumner School.

A study completed in 1958 by the University of Denver's Bureau of Educational Research in fact ranked Monroe School above Sumner. The study evaluated the quality of a school by assigning points for the building design and structure; service systems; classrooms; and the site on which the building was located. Monroe received a total score of 498 on a scale of 1000, while Sumner only earned a score of 435. Still, some have argued that Sumner was a much better school because it was located in a more pleasant neighborhood than Monroe; it was much lighter in color and therefore offered a more inviting atmosphere; it had a much greater focus on detail and ornament; and it was erected at a much greater cost than was Monroe.

It is difficult to evaluate how vast these differences might have been for several reasons. First, the greater cost of Sumner Elementary School could be explained by the fact that the school had to house more children. Second, Sumner school was built in 1936, ten years after the Monroe school; construction costs had certainly increased over that period of time. Finally, the fact that the Sumner school was built during the Depression may explain one reason for the extra attention to detail. Although unconfirmed, one possibility is that, since Sumner Elementary was built with funding from the Works Progress Administration, some of that money could have been used to employ artists who were out of work.

Whether or not the schools in Topeka were different from one another, what made the Brown case similar to the other four it joined was the fact of segregation. Plaintiffs maintained that segregation of schools "denie[d] them equal educational opportunities which the Fourteenth Amendment secures." To prove their case, attorneys relied on testimony from prominent psychologists and social scientists, who claimed that segregation implied the inferiority of black children,

who often came to accept a lower social status and believed that they would not rise to the same levels of achievement as their white counterparts.

The chief exponent of the psychological testing was Kenneth Clark, who became well known during the hearings for his so-called "doll tests." Clark, with his wife and professional colleague Mamie Phipps Clark, conducted tests on children with four dolls, two of which were brown-skinned and two of which were white. He would begin by asking children simple questions to see that they could identify the dolls, and then would ask them to show him "the doll you like best" or which "the good doll" was. Overwhelming numbers of children preferred the white dolls. Similarly, children tended to reject the black dolls or to identify them as "bad" or as the one that they disliked.

Later studies not only replicated the Clarks' findings, but they also found that children acted out other racial stereotypes. Subjects would place black dolls in model tenement houses (as opposed to a painted single-dwelling house with trees in the yard) or dress black dolls in shabbier clothing than the white dolls. Clark and others concluded from this pattern of behavior that black children had a "corrosive awareness" of their own color, one that degraded their own existence and made them feel inferior to white children. He later said, "Some of these children, particularly in the North, were reduced to crying when presented with dolls and asked to identify with them." This psychological testimony was faulted by the attorneys for the defense. Such information was relatively new in the field of psychology and that the test results depended upon a very small sample, making them less reliable than if a larger number of subjects had been used.

The defense went on to maintain that they were simply defending "tradition" and "custom," that because there was "no willful, intentional or substantial discrimination," schools in Topeka functioned acceptably. They also argued that the Board of Education was upholding the law passed by the Kansas legislature in 1879 and using the authority of cases like Plessy v. Ferguson to justify the continued segregation of public school facilities. School administrators, most notably Dr. Kenneth McFarland, the Topeka Superintendent of Schools (without making an effort to assess public opinion), maintained that "there is no objective evidence that there is any substantial desire for a change among the people that the board represents."

Thus, it would be up to the Supreme Court to overrule itself. Before a final decision could be issued, however, Chief Justice Fred Vinson died of a heart attack. Litigants had to wait until Chief Justice Earl Warren was appointed and the case reargued in 1953. On May 17, 1954, the Court handed down its unanimous judgement, which read in part:

Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal education opportunities? We believe that it does....

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Leola Brown Montgomery recalls that she was at home alone ironing when the Brown decision was announced on the radio: "I heard that decision come over and, oh my God, I was screaming there by myself... the children got home before [Rev. Brown] did, and I told them... and when he got home... all of us, we were just shouting and crying." Later, black Topekans gathered to celebrate the outcome of the Brown decision together in similar fashion.

Despite the momentous outcome of the case, black citizens generally responded in guarded fashion. The Kansas American, a black newspaper, received an editorial letter from a man on May 21, 1954, who wrote:

So far as Kansas is concerned, a state law allowing city school districts of certain sizes to maintain separate elementary schools is thrown out. This will make little difference, because the districts involved in most instances already have prepared to change the set-ups. Greatest problem may be that of retaining our many excellent Negro teachers in certain school systems in the face of some existing prejudice.

The American reported on May 28, 1954, that Topeka attorney Charles Bledsoe (who had worked with the Scott family firm) also feared that black teachers would be

fired in the wake of the Brown decision. In fact, the suspicions voiced by black newspapers like the American were well-founded. As early as March, 1953, some black teachers received a letter like the one addressed to Darla Buchanan, which made the position of the Board of Education clear:

Due to the present uncertainty about enrollment next year in schools for negro children, it is not possible at this time to offer you employment for next year. If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional, our Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for white children....

If it turns out that segregation is not terminated, there will be nothing to prevent us from negotiating a contract with you at some later date this spring. You will understand that I am sending letters of this kind to only those teachers of the negro schools who have been employed during the last year or two.

Apparently other teachers responded to the impending decision whether they had received a letter or not. James Gilbert, a teacher and principal in Topeka's black schools, described his situation in the months before the Brown decision was handed down. Gilbert supervised several teachers; one woman, Mrs. Knight, fearing that she would not keep her job in Topeka schools, left to take a job at another school still within the county. Gilbert continued:

she [Mrs. Knight] was replaced by Mrs. Ford. She couldn't get a job so she went to San Diego. Mrs. Hall couldn't get a job; she went to Denver. Mrs. Todd was the only one out of the batch-- I think they put her in... substitute teaching.

Blacks also forecast another problem when they learned of the Brown decision. Many of them realized that the Supreme Court could only reverse Plessy v. Ferguson; it had no authority to prescribe and enforce a remedy to segregation. As the Kansas City Plaindealer reported, blacks especially felt that "it remains to be seen whether or not some southern states will take drastic steps to circumvent the high tribunal's ruling." Although "it [was] apparent that no violent immediate shakeup of the school system will be coming forthwith,"

black newspapers and their readers voiced continuing hope for the reargument of the Brown case a year later.

The case was heard again in the Supreme Court in 1955 to confront the specific question of segregation in the schools and to try to arrive at a formula by which public schools would achieve compliance with the ruling. The so-called "Brown II" decision of 1955 urged that desegregation of public schools take place "with all deliberate speed," leaving the timetable for compliance very loose. It did, however, make clear that "school authorities have primary responsibility for elucidating, assessing, and solving problems" related to school segregation. Despite the significance of this unprecedented finding, the full impact of the Brown decision years later is still debated.

5. After the Brown decision:

If the import of the Brown v. Board of Education decision was clear, its impact is less so. Some scholars agree that the Brown decision offered a legal precedent to African-Americans that allowed the Civil Rights Movement to gain momentum. For example, Anthony Lewis has argued that "it took the drama of school desegregation, and then of the protest movements, to make the possibility of freedom come alive." Indeed, an unprecedented stream of legislation was passed, including several Civil Rights Acts and the national prohibition on discrimination in interstate transport. This suggested to some that blacks took the opportunities first offered by the Brown decision to continue their demands for expanded civil rights.

Others, however, claim that the impact of the Brown decision was much more limited. Robert Burk, for example, cites the slow progress and even the refusal of school districts across the nation to comply with school desegregation. Most scholars also devote some portion of their writing to the increasingly hostile white response to the Civil Rights Movement, especially in the South. Two especially dramatic events, the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock in 1957, served to turn the national focus away from Topeka and toward the southern states.

Yet Topeka remained an important site for the continuing discussion on desegregation well after the Brown decision was handed down. The Topeka Board of Education had initially presented a plan for desegregation of its

schools during the Supreme Court proceedings. Many African-Americans in Topeka hoped that such an action would mean a rapid solution to the inequalities they felt. In the first years after the Brown decision, some desegregation of schools could be reported, and black children began to emerge in small numbers in the formerly all-white schools. Sumner Elementary was desegregated in 1955, although Linda Brown never attended that school. By the time the Brown decision was handed down, she attended Curtis Junior High School. Several years later, another of Oliver Brown's daughters, Cheryl, was able to attend Sumner Elementary.

Cheryl Brown Henderson recalled that a teacher of hers at Sumner Elementary felt that the Brown decision, although significant, was a part of the past. According to Henderson, since Topeka had a long tradition of integrated schools beyond the elementary level and because she was in a school with children from her neighborhood, it was neither unusual nor uncomfortable to go to the previously all-white school. Former classmate Sherman Parks Jr., agreed, saying that he did not remember "any particular racial problems" at Sumner.

Ned Nusbaum, principal of Topeka High School in 1993, also did not recall the desegregation of Topeka's schools as being a momentous event. A white student in Linda Brown's class, he claimed that since Topekans were accustomed to integrated education beyond the elementary school level, there was little direct response to the Supreme Court decision. Indeed, according to Nusbaum, there were no incidents to his recollection of white hostility or anger directed at black citizens in Topeka.

There were some racial incidents which seemed to be isolated to small numbers of white students. Al Lewis and his black friends, for example, were sometimes chased home by older white students from Van Buren Elementary. He and other black students called these incidents "minor" and felt that they were to be expected in any community, not as an outcome of the Brown decision but rather as the impact of social conditioning within families at that time. In fact, Lewis and other former students in the Topeka public school system generally regard the Brown decision as one of the most significant events that impacted their lives.

Still, when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) conducted an investigation in December of 1973, it found that Monroe school was not "in compliance with the unitary plan of education." Cheryl Brown



Henderson, having graduated from college and teaching at Monroe Elementary from 1972 to 1974, recalled that about ninety-five percent of the students at Monroe were black, suggesting that it had not achieved the goals of the 1955 Brown decision. The Board of Education set about forming a new plan that would coordinate with the closing of Monroe and several other elementary schools at the end of the 1974-1975 academic year. Doing so, according to Henderson, accomplished two objectives. First, it would allow some redistribution of students to achieve a better racial balance. Second, it would solve the difficulties that elementary schools (Monroe Elementary included) had with declining enrollments at the time.

Even after attendance lines were redrawn, many schools could be (and were) still identified as "black" schools. Some individuals thought that maintaining schools which were still "racially identifiable" stigmatized black students. Beginning in 1979, lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union brought suit against Topeka Public Schools in what is now called the "Brown III" case, claiming that an appropriate racial balance in public schools still had not been achieved. As Sherman Parks Jr. points out, the irony of that situation was that if students attended the school nearest their home (as the plaintiffs in the original Brown case wished), then they would in many cases still be attending schools that were "racially identifiable." It took until June of 1993 for the case to travel again to the Supreme Court, where the Justices found that the Topeka schools still had not achieved the racial balance that was intended with the passage of the Brown decision in 1954. The case was sent back to the District Court of Kansas, where new plans for establishing a better racial balance in Topeka schools were to be considered.

In light of the fact that the Brown decision retained such importance in Topeka, Monroe Elementary School stands for some as a reminder of the progress that remains to be accomplished in relation to African-American education. Yet for others, the school is an icon of the progress that black Americans made in the field of education in spite of the challenges they faced. Most of all, it is a reminder of the significance of the Brown decision. According to a fifth grader in Topeka in 1992: "It means a lot, especially to black people. It shows them they're important just as much as anybody else in the world."

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Monroe School is a two-story, dark brick building that draws upon various architectural styles of the early twentieth century. Like many of the schools designed by Thomas Williamson, it features arched windows, heavy cornices, a projecting entry of contrasting stone, a stone base, and large, overhanging eaves. Less common but also part of some of Williamson's school designs, Monroe features ornamental bas reliefs on the north and south elevations and a clay tile roof, both indicative of popular architectural styles in the early twentieth century. The building is of masonry bearing wall construction, with modest decorative limestone motifs and a limestone planter around the building's perimeter. The projecting bay of the front (east) entry is faced entirely in limestone. The north and south entries are prominently defined by limestone detailing as well. A hipped roof, originally of clay tile, gives accent to the building's horizontality. The building measures 61 feet north-south and 174 feet east-west overall and has an eastern facade orientation. A flat-roofed gymnasium projects centrally from the building's western elevation, extending 15 feet east-west beyond the main block of the building's footprint, and measuring 72 feet north-south. Monroe School is situated on a 2.017 acre lot and fronts onto a large grassy park.

2. Condition of fabric: Although the building has stood vacant since 1975, it remains in very good structural condition. Mr. Stueve has made efforts to make repairs to some water damage in the attic of the building. Although a fire blackened some of the walls and ceiling of the first floor southeast room and hallway, little damage to those features can be reported. Some of the plaster on interior walls and ceilings has deteriorated and crumbled away from concrete and masonry substrata. Finally, although the building remains structurally intact, the removal of several partitions has left large recesses in the walls, floors, and ceilings of the second-floor east side classrooms, and in the first-floor east rooms.

B. Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Monroe School is a two-story brick structure which measures 61 feet north-south and 174 feet east-west.

2. Foundations: The foundation wall, visible in the basement, is of rubble stone construction.

3. Walls: The walls are of dark bricks laid in common bond. Large reliefs in a simple geometric pattern adorn the northern and the southern walls of the building. The base of the exterior wall is of smooth-faced limestone.

4. Structural system, framing: A cast-in-place concrete floor slab with integral turned-down beams spans east-west to load-bearing corridor walls. The exterior of the building features load-bearing masonry of brick and terra cotta composition.

5. Stoops: A concrete stoop of two steps is at the school's main entrance on the eastern face of the building. A small concrete ramp was constructed in the early 1980s to afford easy access to the north entrance at the end of the hall.

6. Chimneys: An old picture of Monroe school shows the single prominent brick chimney of roughly square dimensions that was a part of the original building. It has since been replaced by a shorter (10' by 2' diameter) stack, although it still appears to be functional. The chimney is located adjacent to the northeast corner of the auditorium.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Monroe school has six exterior doorways; the northern and southern ends of the building, the main entrance (facing east), a north-facing door set off the edge of the auditorium, an exit from the women's rest room on the first floor which opens to the west, and another exit from the kitchen area that opens westward. All openings are double doors except for the single door openings in the kitchen area and the women's rest room.

The main doors on the east side of Monroe School are of wood with six lights each and a fan transom. Hardware consists of a closure, panic bar, kickplates, metal center style and ball bearing hinges.

The north and south doors are replacement doors of wood with one light each; their hardware consists of closures, a panic bar, metal center style, and ball bearing hinges. The date of their

installation is not known.

b. Windows: Most of the windows at Monroe school are paired upper and lower steel casement windows of four-over-ten lights. Typical windows feature a cast concrete sill with a brick soldier course at the window head and five knuckle hinges. Window panes are typically 1/8" thick, non-insulated clear glass. Patterned glass is typically used in rest rooms. The auditorium's balcony level is naturally illuminated via three paladian windows. All windows at the Monroe school have been subject to vandalism; a large number of replacement panes are now in place.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The hipped roof gives the deceptive appearance of being low-pitched, although it is pitched at 9/12. The roof over the auditorium is a flat built-up roof with scuppers which open to exposed metal downspouts. An old photograph shows the building's original pitched roof with clay tiles, and mass-produced red clay tile fragments were found in the attic during the building survey. Presently, the roof is clad with red asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: A fragment of cornice found during the survey appears to be of cast concrete. The roof has wide, overhanging eaves with integral metal gutters draining to exposed metal downspouts.

#### C. Description of interior:

##### 1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement consists of two rooms; a boiler room, and an anteroom to the boiler room that has a ladder extending to the surface. The basement has a concrete slab floor. The walls are painted rubble stone. The ceiling is exposed concrete. A 4' x 4' mechanical access way with a concrete rat slab and metal lath ceiling runs just inside the perimeter foundation wall.

b. First floor: Monroe school is built on a center passage plan, with a small axis hall halfway down the main corridor. The Monroe school is entered on axis at the east side of the building, through an entry vestibule and into a 12' x 20' entry hall,

immediately flanked on either side by school offices.

The auditorium is situated on the western end of the axis along the main north-south corridor. Four pairs of double doors provide access to this room, which also served as a cafeteria and gymnasium. A large raised stage is situated on the south end of the auditorium.

The north-south central corridor is terminated on either end with secondary egress. Faint scars in the wall paint indicate that the corridor once featured small vestibules at either end. Classrooms occupy the eastern half of the first floor; the interior partitions have been removed from the eastern classrooms, leaving large recesses in the walls, ceiling, and floors in some rooms; the recesses have been patched where partitions were removed in the southeast classrooms.

The school's kitchen is adjacent to the auditorium immediately to the north. It was extensively remodeled during the summer of 1969. Cooking equipment has since been removed although the range hood is still attached to the ceiling, and the room stands nearly empty.

The kindergarten room is situated in the extreme southwest corner of the building. It features its own toilet room and a gas fireplace of brick and cast concrete with a simple floral pattern. One of the two doorways would have opened into the southern vestibule at the end of the corridor. The kindergarten room remains the best preserved room in the building.

Men's toilet rooms are stacked on the first and second floor at the northwest corner of the building. The men's toilet room on the first floor was accessible from inside the vestibule at the northern end of the corridor. Women's toilet rooms are stacked adjacent to the auditorium stage; the first floor toilet room provides direct access to the exterior of the school.

Stairways at either end of the main corridor provide access to the second floor. Once open stairways with an exposed balustrade, they are now enclosed on the first floor with gypsum board.

c. Second floor: The second floor follows a similar plan to the first; a large central corridor allows access to what were formerly four classrooms on the eastern side of the building with the central, projecting east bay functioning as a library. Interior partitions have been removed from these rooms, leaving deep recesses in the walls, ceiling, and floors. On the western side of the hallway, large classrooms on the extreme northern and southern ends of the building flank the balcony level of the auditorium. The balcony's terminus at the stage end of the western wall creates a dead end corridor, not permissible by today's building codes.

d. Attic: The attic at present is entered by way of a wooden ladder that extends from the second floor southwest classroom. It covers the entire footprint of the building below, with the exception of the auditorium. The floor is poured-in-place concrete. There is no insulation in the attic.

2. Stairways: There are two stairways, one at either end of the main north-south corridor. The original design had open stairwells, although recently they have been enclosed with gypsum board partition. Metal newel posts still protrude from the gypsum board at the base of the stairs. The balustrade consists of a wooden hand rail and simple square metal balusters approximately 3" on center.

3. Flooring: The flooring in Monroe school is of several types. In the corridors and bathrooms, terrazzo flooring with a narrow inlaid border of 3/4" square white tiles was used. The classrooms and balcony have 2-1/2" wide wood flooring which typically runs north-south. Carpet has since been placed over the wood in the southeast room on the first floor and in the center section of the east classrooms in which the partitions have been removed. The library, originally laid in vinyl asbestos tile, was later covered by carpeting. Vinyl asbestos tile also covers the floor in the auditorium.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are covered in plaster applied over masonry walls. Ceilings in the Monroe school are plaster over metal lath. Walls are currently painted light shades of green and yellow in various rooms in the school. In the bathroom, a white tile wainscot extends 5'6" up the wall; the remainder is plaster painted white. In the classrooms, typically there is a groove near the ceiling running around the

perimeter of the room, serving as a picture mold. Chair rails and wall base are of formed plaster, some of which have been damaged or removed. Blackboards have also been removed, revealing the metal lath in the walls behind them. The wall base is finished with a quarter round wood shoe.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: In the early 1980s, most of the first-floor doors were replaced by windowless 1-3/4" solid wood doors. A hollow core door replaced the original door in the office adjacent to the northeast classrooms on the first floor. Many of these appear to have reused the original hardware. On the second floor, the original doors still remain; they are natural finish wood panel doors with a window. No transoms are evident on either floor.

b. Windows: The original doors in Monroe school had windows with clear or patterned glazing in them, presumably to allow some natural light into the corridor. No other interior glazing is evident. On the first floor, the kindergarten room (farthest southwest) and the auditorium are supplied well with natural light and are generally very bright rooms. Other first-floor rooms are less well lit and tend to get dark when the sun shines against the opposite side of the building. The second-floor rooms are lit somewhat better by natural light due to large windows on east/west elevations.

6. Decorative features and trim: Of the original wood trim, much has been removed with the demolition of interior partitions, although representative samples remain throughout the building. Miller Sanitary School Wardrobes have been removed from the site. Small built-in cabinets with adjustable shelving are in all the classrooms. Two-shelf bookshelves are in the northeast first floor classroom, but are not against the wall. Cabinets with three shelves flank either side of the kindergarten fireplace. The cabinets are painted wood; no decorative trim is used. All but one of the eight simple doors which covered the cabinets have been removed. The fireplace is made of bricks and cast concrete; a simple floral motif is used on the panel directly below the mantel.

7. Hardware: All of the hardware in Monroe school appears to be heavy duty grade, with emphasis on function, not

ornament.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: A boiler, an oil burner, and unit ventilators were installed in Monroe school in 1964 to compensate for older heating and ventilation systems that were considered inadequate.

Inspections of the building in 1958 found that ventilation was inadequate in Monroe school. Air conditioning was installed for the first time in 1963, and forced air fan coils add to air circulation in the building.

b. Lighting: Electric service was updated in the building in 1957. Fluorescent lighting was added to Monroe school in the early 1980s, but the original fixtures remain in the gymnasium. The lights are cylindrical with colored glass and unique ornamental metal rims. Smaller lights of a similar pattern adorn the underside of the balcony level. Glass globes above the fireplace in the kindergarten room have been removed. Two exterior lights flanking the front entrance have been removed and were missing at least since 1953. Three exterior security lights were added to the building in 1975.

c. Plumbing: Most of the plumbing fixtures have been disconnected but are being stored in the school. At present, Monroe school does not have water service.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design:

Monroe Elementary School still occupies the lot on which it originally stood in 1926. The row of trees growing along the sidewalk on Monroe Avenue still exists. Across Monroe Avenue, a grassy park area owned by the school is bounded on its far eastern side by a chain-link fence topped by barbed wire and a set of railroad tracks. The grassy lot is heavily overgrown, but the baseball backstop in one corner still stands. A chain-link fence has since been erected around the building to protect it from occasional acts of vandalism. Inside that fence, asphalt surfaces still exist, although weeds protrude from the seams. No playground equipment is present.



although Leola Brown Montgomery recalled that a sliding board and other items were part of the schoolyard to the south of the building. The rest of the lot occupied by Monroe School is grass which is only occasionally maintained.

In the 1920s, the area was heavily populated by the blacks, perhaps in part because of its proximity to the railroads, which offered some jobs to African-Americans. Sanborn maps show that dwellings in the Monroe School area were simple frame structures, usually single story wood structures with shingle roofs. Small businesses and churches could be located in the vicinity, and were sometimes built of concrete or stone. Monroe School is now situated in a neighborhood zoned for residential living and light industry. The neighborhood reflects a mixture of races and of socioeconomic standing of its residents. While some houses reflect careful attention to maintenance, others are extremely worn; a few of these are boarded up.

One Monroe School alumnus, Willie Coles, remembers that in the 1950s there was a simple restaurant across Fifteenth Street from the school which was surrounded by small shacks in which poorer black Topekanians lived. That lot is now vacant, although large buildings dedicated to light industry are interspersed with the houses in this lower-middle class neighborhood. Coles also said that Monroe Avenue, now a one-way street, was a two-way thoroughfare in the 1950s, and claimed that it was a challenge for school children to cross safely to get to the triangular park across the street.

### PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

#### A. Architectural drawings:

Original drawings of the Monroe School by Thomas Williamson are extant and available in the Kansas Collection at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Viewing restrictions on the collection will be lifted in 1998.

#### B. Early views:

Xerox copy of photograph, Monroe Elementary School (ca. 1927); original housed in the Kansas State Historical Society.

Xerox copy of photograph, Monroe Elementary School (ca. 1960); original owned by Topeka Public Schools.

C. Interviews:

Linda Brown Buckner, August 12, 1993, Kansas State Historical Society, 120 W. Tenth St., Topeka, Kansas. Linda Brown Buckner is the daughter of Oliver Brown and inadvertently became the focus of the Brown decision.

Cheryl Brown Henderson, August 9, 1993, Kansas State Historical Society, 120 W. Tenth St., Topeka, Kansas. Cheryl Brown Henderson is the daughter of Rev. Oliver Brown.

Alfred R. Lewis, 424 S. Kansas Ave., Topeka, Kansas. Mr. Lewis is the nephew of Oliver Brown began attending public schools in Topeka immediately after the Brown decision was handed down in the 1950s.

Leola Brown Montgomery, August 16, 1993, 904 SW Lincoln, Topeka, Kansas. Mrs. Montgomery was the wife of Rev. Oliver Brown and the mother of three daughters who attended Topeka's public schools.

Ned Nusbaum, July 27, 1993, Topeka High School, 800 Tenth Ave., Topeka, Kansas. Informal interview with the principal and former classmate of Linda Brown.

Sherman Parks Jr., August 11, 1993, Landon State Office Building, 900 SW Jackson St., Topeka, Kansas. Parks was a classmate and friend of Cheryl Brown Henderson.

Frank Wilson, August 6, 1993, 2888 Knollwood Ct., Topeka, Kansas. Wilson was principal of Sumner Elementary School in 1951 when Oliver Brown tried to enroll his daughter there.

D. Bibliography:

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Board Minutes, Monroe School, TPS

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Topeka Public Schools, files on Monroe School, building pictures, and old class pictures available, TPS

## 2. Court Decisions:

United States Supreme Court:

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Oliver Brown et. al. v. Board of Education 74 S. Ct. 686 (1954)

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E. Likely sources not investigated:

1. Thomas Williamson papers at the Kansas Collection. Access to viewing the Williamson collection will be restricted until 1998.

F. Supplemental material:

Drawings of floor plans and front elevation.

Sanborn maps, 1889, 1896, and 1913.

Xerox copies of early photographs of Monroe school.

Topeka city map denoting important locations related to the Brown decision and to black education in Topeka.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was sponsored by the Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) of the National Park Service. Documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) under the direction of Paul Dolinsky, chief of HABS. The project's sponsor was Sandra Washington, interim site manager of Brown v. Board, administered from the MWRO in Omaha, Nebraska. HABS architect Joseph Balachowski and HABS historian Catherine Lavoie assisted the project from the Washington D.C. office. The project was completed during the summer of 1993 at the HABS office in the Monroe Elementary School, Topeka Kansas, by project supervisor Roland Smith, architect, with architecture technicians Denise Hopkins, project foreman (Lawrence Technological University, Michigan), Scotney Fenton (Ball State University), David Hurley (Oklahoma State University), and historian Sarah Heath (University of Cincinnati). Heath conducted all of the historical research and wrote the historical information sections. Heath consulted closely with the architectural team, chiefly Roland Smith, to complete the architectural information section. Indispensable assistance also came from Mr. Mark A. Stueve, the owner of Monroe School, Dr. Ramon Powers at the Kansas State Historical Society for the use of interviewing facilities, and Cheryl Brown Henderson, President of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research.

Figure #1: Key to Sites

1. McKinley Elementary School, 915 NW Western Ave. McKinley Elementary was one of four schools open to black children in Topeka before 1955, and the school that Linda Brown attended in fifth grade. McKinley Elementary was closed in 1955 and serves as a warehouse.
2. St. Mark's AME Church, 801 NW Harrison. Reverend Oliver Brown was assigned as the pastor at St. Mark's and worked there from 1954 until 1959, when he and his family moved to Springfield, Missouri.
3. Location of the Brown family residence, 511 SW First Street. Linda Brown traveled from this location to Monroe School, nearly two miles away, although the all-white Sumner school was much closer. The house was destroyed to make room for highway construction.
4. Sumner Elementary School, 330 SW Western Ave. Another school designed by architect Thomas Williamson, Sumner Elementary was the all-white school in which Oliver Brown tried to enroll his daughter. It became a focus of the Brown v. Board of Education case, and was declared a National Historic Landmark in May 1987.
5. Federal Courthouse, Fifth and Kansas Ave. This was the location of the initial hearings in the Brown v. Board of Education case. The Federal Courthouse has since been moved from this building, which still houses the central branch of the Topeka Post Office.
6. NAACP Law Offices, 724 Kansas Ave. The second floor of this building was the law office of Scott, Scott, Scott, and Bledsoe, the NAACP attorneys who argued the Brown case.
7. St. John's AME Church, Seventh and Topeka. Oliver Brown served as assistant pastor and sexton of this church when Brown v. Board of Education was first filed in 1951.
8. Lucinda Todd home, 1007 SW Jewell Ave. Lucinda Todd was the mother of a child who attended segregated schools and an NAACP secretary. She is credited with calling the national NAACP to request assistance in the case which eventually traveled to the Supreme Court.
9. Buchanan Elementary School, 1195 SW Buchanan. Buchanan was one of four elementary schools open to black children in Topeka before 1955. It was closed in 1959 and is now owned by a construction company.
10. Washburn University. Many prominent black Topekans such as attorneys John Scott and Charles Scott, and Monroe Elementary School teacher Mamie Williams, received their degrees from Washburn



University.

11. Holy Name Parochial School, 934 SW Clay Ave. James and Iona Richardson sent their son to Holy Name rather than have him attend the all-black Buchanan School because they did "not believe in segregation."

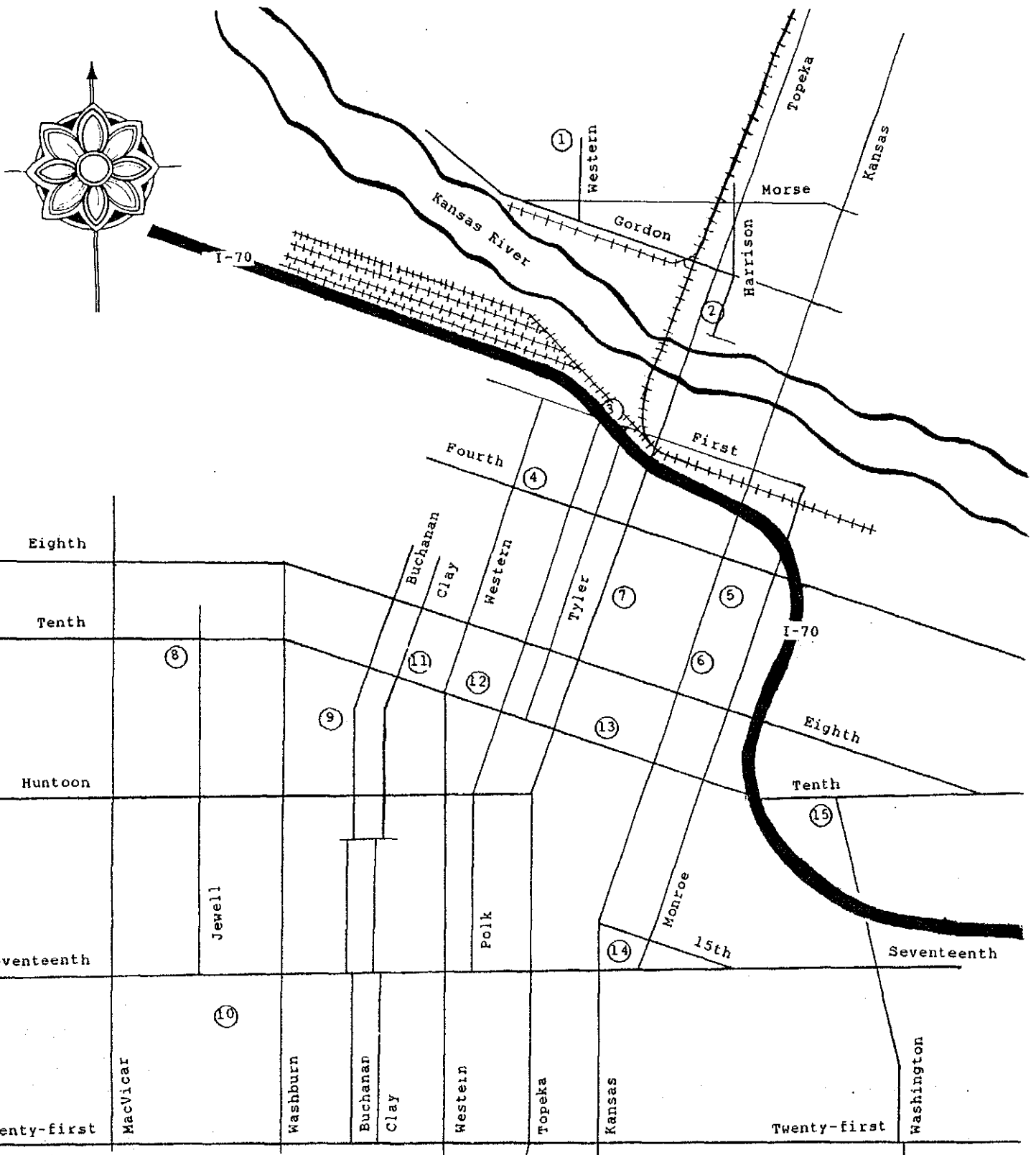
12. Topeka High School, 800 SW Tenth Street. Topeka High School, perhaps regarded as Thomas Williamson's crowning achievement, was built in 1936. The High School was never segregated, although it did field all-black athletic teams and provided separate social organizations to black and white students until the late 1950s.

13. State Capitol Building. It was the Kansas State Legislature that granted public elementary schools to segregate black and white students in 1879. Assistant Attorney General Paul Williams worked out of the State Capitol in the 1950s when he argued the Brown case on behalf of the state of Kansas.

14. Washington Elementary School location, 1000 SE Washington Ave. Washington was the third of four elementary schools open to black children before the Brown decision was handed down. It was closed in 1962 and has since been razed.

15. Monroe Elementary School, 1515 Monroe Ave. Monroe Elementary School is the building that Linda Brown attended from kindergarten through the fourth grade. It has become a symbol of the Brown v. Board of Education decision and was declared a National Historic Landmark in December 1991.

Figure #1: Map of Topeka, Kansas: Significant sites related to black education and the Brown v. Board of Education decision.



Figures #2: Sanborn Map: 1889, showing the location of earlier Monroe Elementary School site

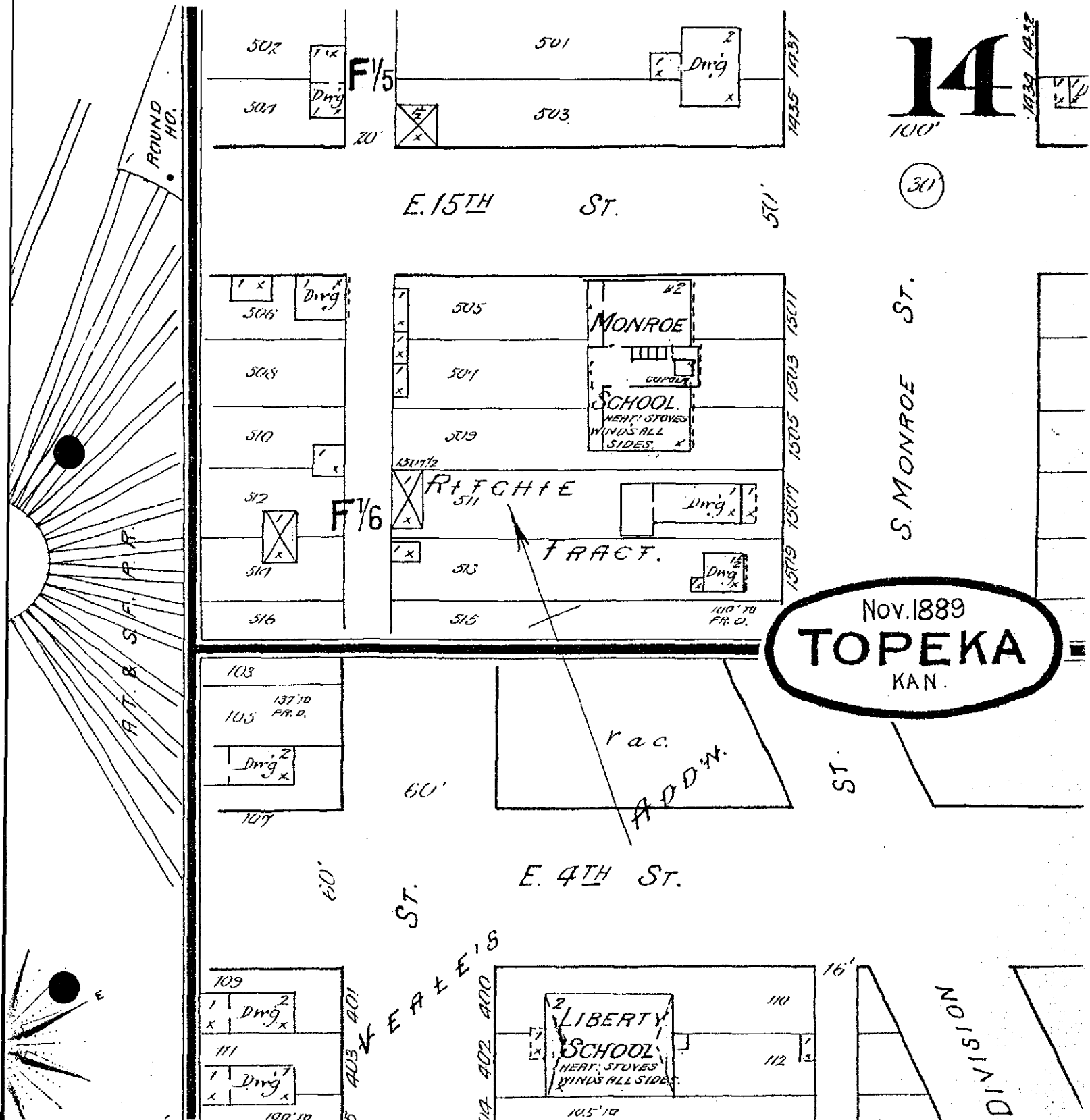
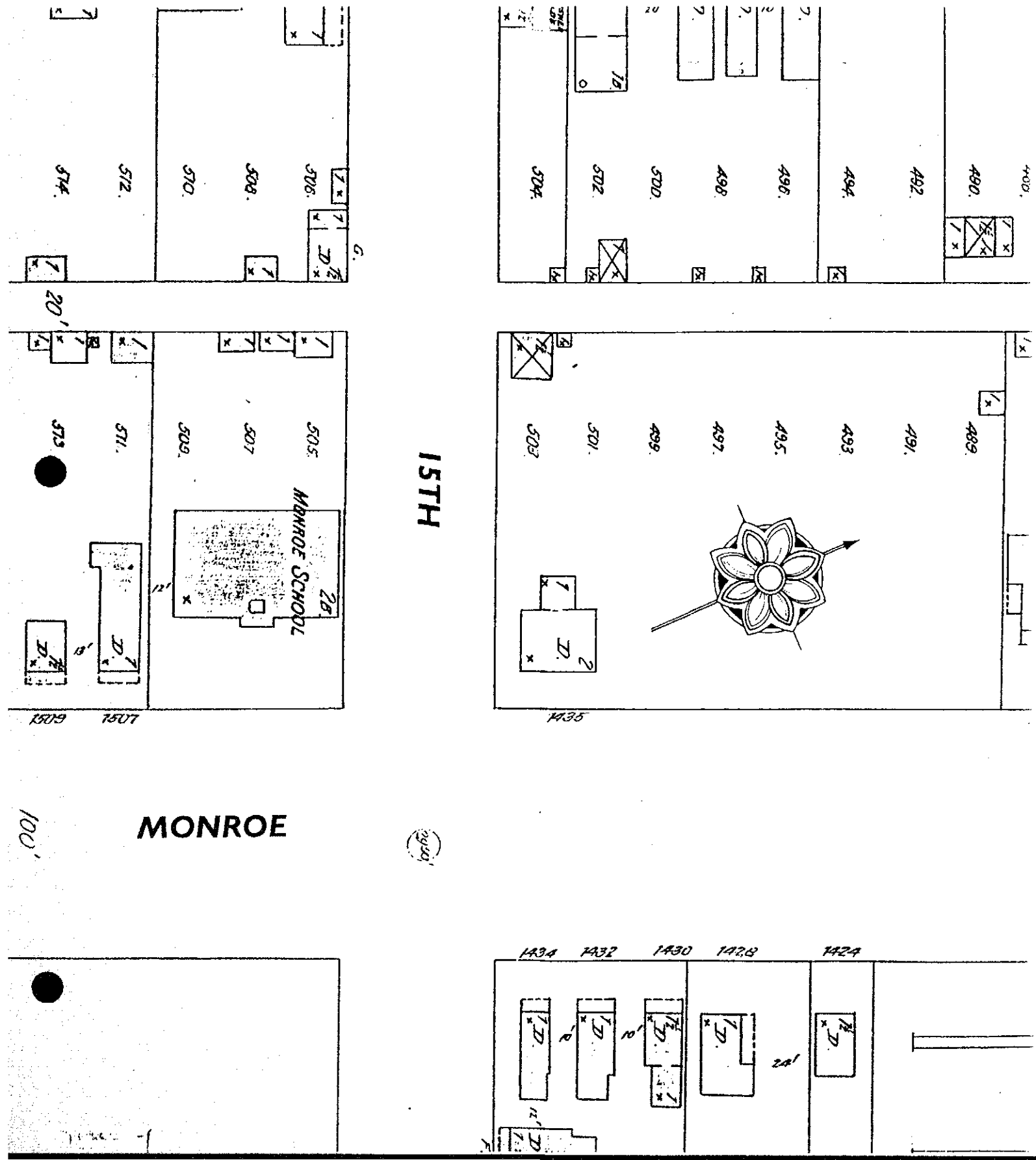


Figure #3: Sanborn Map: 1896, showing the location of earlier Monroe Elementary School site



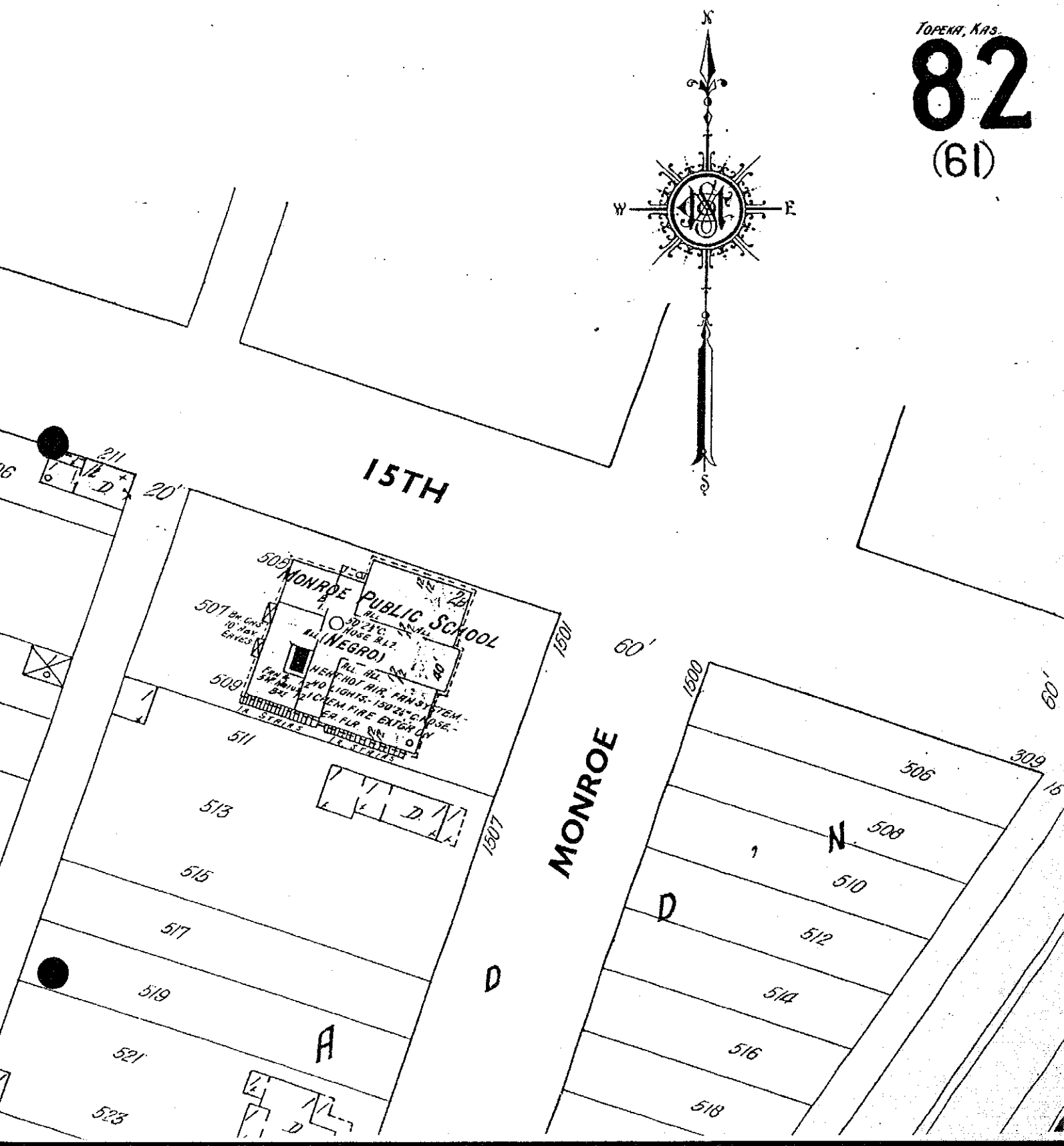


Figure #5: Monroe School, front entrance, ca. 1927; xerox of photograph from the Kansas State Historical Society

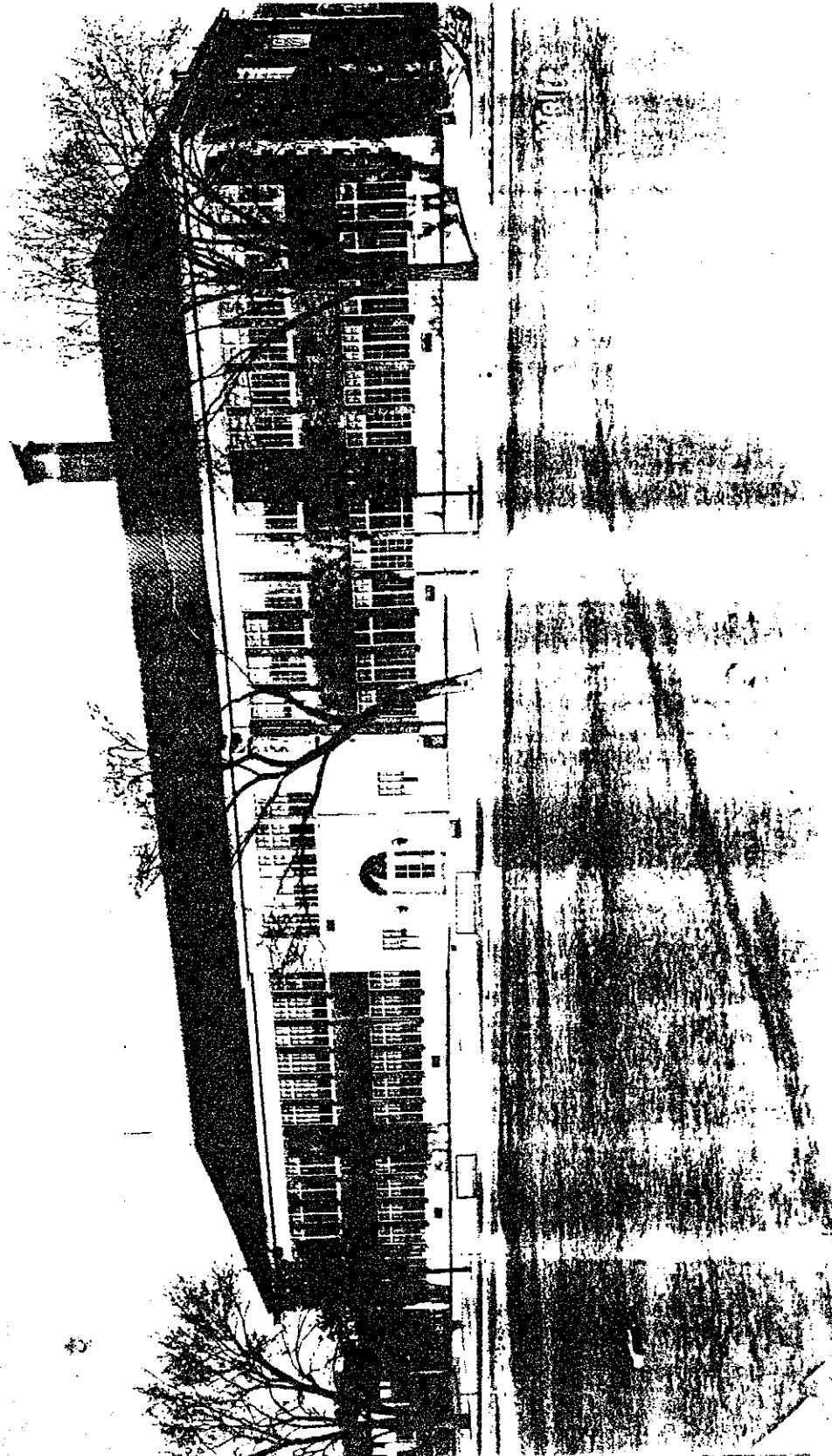


Figure #6: Monroe School, front entrance, ca. 1960; xerox of photograph from Topeka Public Schools

